

The Vision Realized: the First Successful Capital City

From the time Louisiana became a state in 1812, the legislature had argued over the capital's ultimate location. In 1850, they could finally legislate in a structure that was successfully built exclusively for the government. The people of Baton Rouge reveled in the **State House** (known today as the Old State Capitol); it was the center of social activity. Politicians still grumbled about the lack of amenities found in the river town; however, because they could not easily return to New Orleans, the legislators accomplished more than they ever had in Donaldsonville.



Louisiana legislature voting on seceding from the union

What legislators had successfully put to rest, the Civil War soon undid. Twelve years after the capital had moved to Baton Rouge, Union forces occupied the city. The capital was hastily relocated to **Opelousas**.

Is That a Fact?

- The legislature appropriated \$100,000 for the capitol in 1847, then approved another \$121,000 to complete the building and add an iron fence.
- The architect, James Dakin, took about 2 1/2 years to complete the building.
- 4,039,786 bricks were used to construct the building.
- The 1861 Louisiana State Secessionist Convention met here.

The State House



Governors serving here were Joseph Walker, Paul O. Hebert, Robert Wickliffe, and Thomas O. Moore.

“Dear Sir: I have the pleasure to inform you that the new Capitol of Louisiana is ready for the reception of the Legislature. We have discharges all of our carpenters and joiners with the exception of seven . . . The fears expressed by some gentlemen that the new edifice would not be ready for the meeting of the Legislature are now at an end, and as for the convenience and capacity of the building, it will answer for itself satisfactorily.”

-James Dakin, architect, to Maunsel White, commissioner

1/7/1850

Louisiana Begins to Rebuild

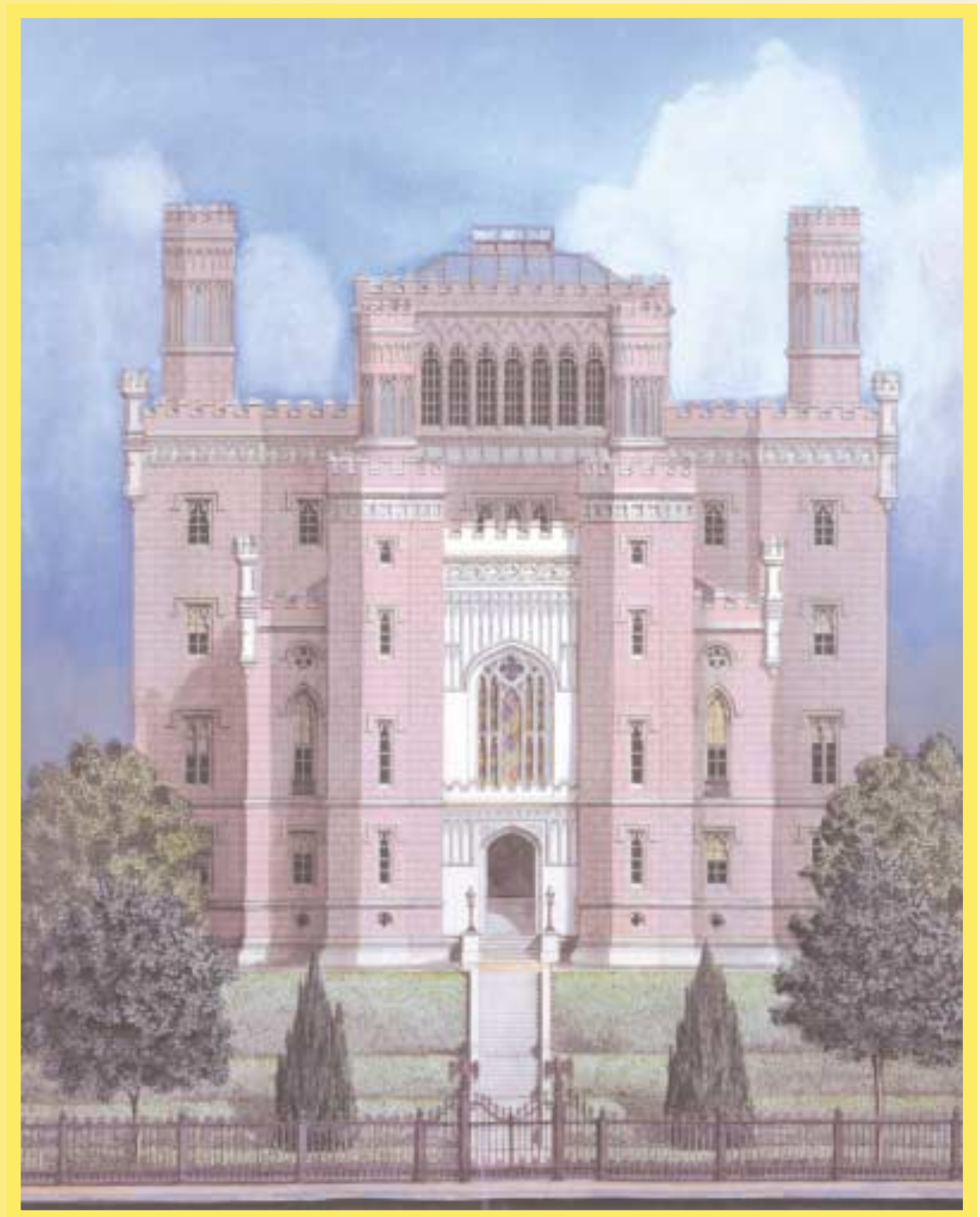
“The Capitol of Louisiana is the only one we believe that presents its face to the millions who annually travel on . . . the mighty Mississippi. We feel proud of it . . . and like the building because it is unique in style and unlike anything of the kind in the nation. A thousand years hence—(when the record will have been eaten up that might tell that this was once the Capitol), the antiquarian will map it down as the Castle of some mighty lord . . . in the nation.”

Baton Rouge Weekly Gazette and Comet, 11/2/1885

With the restoration of the **State House**, the Louisiana government found a permanent home in Baton Rouge. Political arguments continued, but none focused on relocating the capital. Over the next 46 years, the government gradually outgrew the building. More space was needed, but to expand the structure meant destroying its architectural integrity.

As primary advocate for a new state capitol, Huey Long worked tirelessly to convince the legislature of the need for a new building. A new state house, Long argued, would accommodate governmental needs and even save money by being efficient. He met with much opposition, but in September 1930, the legislature approved funding for the capitol. The government moved into the new building 13 months later.

The State House



Governors serving here were Samuel D. McEnery, Francis R. Tillou Nicholls, Murphy J. Foster, William W. Heard, Newton C. Blanchard, Jared Y. Sanders, Luther E. Hall, Ruffin G. Pleasant, John M. Parker, Henry L. Fuqua, Oramel H. Simpson, Huey P. Long, and Alvin O. King.

Is That a Fact?

- The Citizens of Baton Rouge offered to help defray the costs of renovating the capitol.
- In 1881, William A. Freret provided an estimate of \$200,000 to rebuild the building (although it appears to have cost over \$300,000 to restore).
- In 1994, after 12 years of work, the State House was finally restored at a cost of over \$9 million.
- After the government vacated the building, it served as offices for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Selective Service and the Louisiana Arts Commission.

1932-present

A Bold New Capitol

Like the capitol before it, the design of the ***New State Capitol*** was meant to make a bold statement. The energy evoked by the building's Art Deco style reflected Huey Long's desire to raise Louisiana out of the bayou and into the twentieth century. The new building had its critics too, many accusing Long of building a monument to his own achievements. Whether Long's critics were right or not does not diminish the significance of the statehouse. One has only to look at the intricacies of the many architectural details to see that it was as much a place for government to work as it was a monument to the history and people of Louisiana.

Is That a Fact?

- Designed by Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth of New Orleans, the capitol took 13 months to complete; it was inspired by Nebraska's state house, which took 13 years to build.
- At 450 feet high, this building is the tallest state capitol in the United States (Nebraska's is 400 feet high).
- Huey P. Long never served in any capacity in the New State Capitol.
- Of Louisiana's thirteen capitols, the current one has been occupied the longest.
- In 1932, one Baton Rouge businessman bet another \$2.50 that the state capitol would still be standing in 500 years. In the year 2432, the heirs of the winner will inherit over \$2 billion.

New State Capitol



Governors serving here were O.K. Allen, James A. Noe, Richard W. Leche, Earl K. Long, Sam Jones, Jimmie Davis, Robert F. Kennon, John J. McKeithen, Edwin W. Edwards, David C. Treen, Charles E. "Buddy" Roemer, and Murphy J. "Mike" Foster.

"When a thousand years will have passed – when generations still unborn shall have the making of the laws of Louisiana – then, perhaps the towering new capitol building will have served its day of usefulness. Then it may yield to the 'march of progress'—a thousand years from now – and tumble to the earth to make way for an even more modern capitol building."

Morning Advocate, 3/22/1939